



Left: *Rheumaptera hastata* L., Partry, Co. Mayo, 23.v.1988 (bred). (x1).  
 Right: ab. *laxata* Krul., Newport, Co. Mayo, 18.v.1988 (bred). (x1).

designated dimorphic. A further interesting observation is that all the colonies of larvae I examined in Co. Mayo were remarkably free from parasites, in marked contrast with my experiences with *nigrescens* in Scotland.

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Mr D. Wilson for the excellent life-size photographs, and to Mr D. Carter of the British Museum (Natural History) for his advice and permission to study the National Collection and relevant literature.

#### References

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#### Moths and bats: the diet of Lady Ursula Eak

On a cool evening in 1989 at St Erth (West Cornwall) I was running a light for the Cornwall Trust for Nature Conservation whilst the local bat group wandered up and down the river bank with their bat detectors at full blast. Only 43 moth species were found, including three specimens of the migrant *Agrotis ipsilon*, as well as three beetles including the first *Dytiscus marginalis* that I have had to light. It is likely that many of the best moths were eaten by bats before they arrived at the light.

As the night wore on the bat people disappeared. One of their number, Ginny Little from Penzance, joined us at the edge of the white sheet, bringing with her a tiny lady companion, Lady Ursula Eak. This lady (a noctule bat) had come to feed. Ginny had become interested in moths some years ago (I suspect purely to feed her bats) and now ran a moth trap. She assured me that she only fed the common species to the sick and injured animals in the "bat hospital" she runs. An acquaintance in Penzance

provided her with a steady supply of *Noctua pronuba*, *Agrotis exclamationis*, *Orthosia gothica* and similar abundant noctuids, whilst keeping such goodies as *Palpita unionalis* to himself.

As the moths came in we began to catch them to feed Ursula. The first course consisted of 7 *Ochropleura plecta* and 2 *Noctua pronuba*, as well as 1 large Tipulid. She also ate 1 *Opisthograptis luteolata*, 1 *Phragmatobia fuliginosa*, 1 *Noctua janthina*, 1 *Diarsia rubi*, 2 *Phlogophora meticulosa*, 2 *Pterostoma palpina*, 1 *Furcula furcula*, 1 *Lymantria monacha* and 1 *Pheosia tremula*. She then refused *Agrotis ipsilon* and *Pleuroptya ruralis*, but perhaps she was full after her meal of 20 large moths and one crane-fly.

I was surprised that she ate *Opisthograptis luteolata* and *Phragmatobia fuliginosa* as in a previous experiment both had been refused by a long-eared bat. I have always taken the colour of both moth species to be an indication of unpalatability. *Phragmatobia fuliginosa* has a noticeable smell which is unpleasant to humans. Not unexpectedly, Lady Ursula also refused *Eilema griseola* and *Abraxas grossulariata*, as well as the beetle *Aphodius rufipes*, which has an obnoxious smell even though at this stage she was not yet full-up. We would have tried *Dytiscus marginalis* which also came to light, but we felt that this would not be fair to the bat. — ADRIAN SPALDING, Tregarne, Cusgarne, Truro, Cornwall.

### *Xylena exsoleta* L., the Sword-grass in v.c. 22 Berkshire

I was interested to read the two notes on this species (*Ent. Rec.* 101: 222). Stephen Nash's record from Fernham is particularly welcome as being the first in v.c. 22 for forty-five years.

Bernard Skinner's note (*loc. cit.*) to the effect that records from southern England for at least the last thirty years all relate to immigrants is also of interest and would seem to accord with what information I have been able to gather in my v.c. 22 index viz:

Locally distributed (Holland. *Vic. Hist.* 1906); Well distributed but scarce., Tubney, 28.ix.29, bred from larva on thistle., Henwood, 1895-7, 1901 (Bretherton, 1940 *Proc. Ashmol. nat. Hist. Soc.* 1939) and finally P.B.M. Allan notes in his Moth Hunter's Gossip "I used to take *exsoleta* in the Kennet Valley but he was always a rarity".

These are all the records I have been able to find other than a wartime find from 1944. In the autumn of that year our unit was encamped in Maidenhead Thicket and on the night of 23rd October I wandered off to explore some ivy growing on what is now the M4 link road. Amongst the more usual autumnal things was a moth sitting in a strange "wrapped around" attitude and whose identity at first defeated me. It is still my only *exsoleta* and until Bernard's interesting note I had not considered it as being a probable immigrant. — B.R. BAKER, Reading Museum and Art Gallery, Reading RG1 1QL.